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These three, then—Character, Discipline, and Knowledge—are the aim of high-school work, and the achievement of that aim will be its enduring monument.

*Thomas Vickers, Superintendent of Schools.  
Portsmouth, Ohio.*

### ON TEACHING ENGLISH.

The recent report of the "Committee on Composition and Rhetoric," made to the Harvard Overseers, and Professor Hart's article on "Regents' Diplomas in English" published in the January issue of the *THE SCHOOL REVIEW*, are depressing, but not wholly unprofitable reading. There can be no wise use of remedies till a diagnosis has been made, and the disease is well understood.

These papers contain the replies of young men, nineteen years old or so and already matriculated in Harvard College or Cornell—replies made to questions asked them relative to their training in English in the preparatory school. Here are a few of their answers taken from, but hardly picked out of, the mass:—"We had no instructor in English. I never had any direct training in English Composition. We studied rhetoric; but only as a theory," says one. Another, telling us, "The first four years I don't think we averaged more than five hours a year in written work," adds, as if to confirm the assertion, "You would almost think that the teachers expected you to know English thoroughly without studying it but very little indeed." And still another, "I studied a rhetoric text-book *Thirty Weeks*, of which a good share of the time was spent in studying poetry, also Metaphors, Anthithesis, Hyperboles, Similies, and other kinds of sentences. We spent some time in Purity—Force and Precision." I might quote further, even at length, but I forbear. From a few learn many if not all—*ex pede Herculem*.

It would be easy to comment with spirit upon the pittance of time doled out to English in these schools and upon the methods of teaching employed—easy to grow facetious over the results of the training these young men exhibit in their replies. But for one I am deeply pained and saddened instead. I cannot wax

savage or merry as I turn over and scan the pages of the report or of the article. My only observation is this : how meagre must be the quantity and how crude the quality of the work in English done in our secondary schools, if the students' answers in these papers tell the truth of the one and fairly illustrate the other. These Colleges must draw upon the best of our schools and upon the brightest and most cultivated pupils in them. If they do these things in a green tree, what shall be done in a dry ?

It is to be hoped that the instruction given there in other studies is better than that given in English, and bears richer fruit. It must be so, and it is. The ideal to be realized in the study of English, the route we are to take in order to realize it, the successive stages of the journey, the steps along the stages, and the method and manner of the steps—of these things have we who are teaching English all a clear and sharply outlined conception ? Are we following a plan that we have formed or deliberately adopted—a plan that brings us daily nearer to our goal ? Do we not see these things as through a mist, vaguely ? What to do, in what order to do it, and by what means, teachers of English are in doubt as, I am persuaded, teachers of Latin or of mathematics are not.

Now this dispiriting condition of things exists in spite of the fact that it is in English and through English that the instruction in other branches is carried on in our schools ; and in spite of the further fact that the best results in other studies cannot be reached by the pupil unless his teacher and he are skilled in this means and medium of communication. English is a study too that the scholar is all the while pursuing—when he reads, listens, speaks ; in communion with writers through their works or with speakers through the voice, addressed or addressing, he is or may be studying English. Besides, it is on all sides confessed that excellence in English is, in and for itself, supremely desirable. It is desirable as an accomplishment. The ability to express ourselves easily and gracefully in a style appropriate to the matter in hand, pat to all its changes, varying as these vary, is an acquisition to be coveted. One's English is already taken as the test and measure of his culture—he is known by the English he keeps. To mistake his words (even to mispronounce them or to speak them indistinctly), to huddle them as a mob into sentences, to trample on plain rules of grammar, to disregard the idioms of the language—these things,

all or severally, disclose the speaker's intellectual standing. One's English betrays his breeding, tells what society he frequents, and determines what doors are to open to him or be closed against him. The attaining of good English is a discipline, too, without superior, must I not say, without equal? What subtle distinction between words and what care in placing them are demanded to create a verbal body that shall fitly incarnate the thought within, and be its apt and adequate expression! What growth of judgment and of taste this constant search after a fit body to fit head develops! What added power of lucid and correct thinking a struggle for luminous and accurate expression gives! for not more certainly does clear thinking beget clear expression than does clear expression demand clear thinking as a condition precedent. And what a troop of useful, everyday virtues this ceaseless striving to say the fitting thing fittingly nourishes—accuracy, truthfulness, painstaking, thoroughness, patience, justice!

If then a generous, and much more a masterful, command of English is so desirable, why is it so rare a possession? Is there any reason that accounts for this? A hearty appreciation of good English, an eager desire and an imperative demand for it—and the supply of it so scanty! What are the causes that defeat our reasonable expectations in this matter, and turn us away disappointed and humiliated? And, in particular, why do our schools do so poorly the work in English expected of them,—do it in the deplorable way revealed by the two papers drawn upon above? What is about to be said in answer to these questions is not offered in exculpation of the teachers of English but only in extenuation. It seems to me that we have peculiar difficulties to contend with—the current is against us, and we have to row against it. It is but just to speak of these difficulties, as they are not generally understood; or, if understood, are forgotten by those who judge us.

We have to deal largely with those who are not merely ignorant of good English but also have already acquired what one at times is sorely tempted to call *incorrigibly* bad English. The twig is bent, and the future tree all but hopelessly inclined, when the pupil first comes into our hands. Before we can sow and harrow in the seed of good English, we must dig out the stumps of ugly habits that preoccupy the ground. Good habits of speech would

grow there, and will, but only after the evil ones have been eradicated. And remember, please, that, in starting under conditions so adverse, this study is almost unique. A pupil beginning arithmetic, geography, algebra, etc., has no misconceptions to be removed before just conceptions can take root. Respecting these studies, the soil of his mind is virgin—untilled, it is true, but with no obstructing growths to be destroyed before it can be tilled. The teacher can thrust in his spade at the start and sow his seed at once.

I do not mean to say that, in their English, boys and girls have all fallen into ways extremely bad. Some come from families in which good English is spoken—few, shall I say none, from families where the English is perfect. Let the fathers and the mothers whose speech is beyond just criticism cast each a stone at the children or the parents whose speech is not; the missiles thrown will hardly grow into a cairn, I think. And what parental care can completely shield the child from the hurtful influences of the street? Slang, misuses of words, and vicious verbal collocations, constructions that kick the traces of grammar, and sentences with clauses misjointed and disjointed abound in the speech of some children more than in that of others, but are found with painful frequency in the speech of all. In a long experience I have yet to encounter in my classes one who has not bowed the knee to Baal.

Ordinarily, our pupils are with us only a few hours of the twenty-four, five days in a week, during four-fifths of the year—the teacher, even in this fraction of the time, only one of the many forces of the school working upon the pupil and forming his habits. How the best instruction of precept or of example, given by the teacher, is neutralized by the faulty teaching proceeding from so many in school and out of school—teaching almost continuous, while his at best is brief and intermittent. The account of the boy's progress in English must, it would seem, be the old story of the frog's escape from the well. The teacher in any other department is not discouraged by such set-backs among his students. His pupil may not learn much of history or of arithmetic when not under actual drill, but at least he holds his own—what he has done is not, all the while, being undone. Those influences of home and of the street that are harmful to the boy's English are unconsciously exerted, and felt unconsciously, it is

true ; but they are all the more baleful because of this unconsciousness. If bad English were purposely taught by his parents or playmates, it would startle the child into consciousness, and set him to thinking. It would recall the explicit instruction of the class-room on the point in question, array the master's higher authority against the parent's or the companion's, confirm his faith in his teacher, and so the noxious teaching would receive its antidote. The more of express contradiction or even questioning which his books or his instructor received the more would the pupil be strengthened in his new and better habits of speech. But this untoward instruction of which I am speaking, unintended and involuntary, awakens no thought and arouses no suspicion. It is dangerous because insidious. It finds the pupil off his guard, with no weapon of defence in his hand. Like those Confederate soldiers who in the darkness relieved the Union pickets in the Valley and sacked the camp, it succeeds because, unaggressive and in the guise of friendliness, it excites no alarm. And it does this all the more easily and effectively that it is the English to which the pupil has longest been accustomed, and with which he is most familiar.

Will my fellow-teachers forgive me, if—making against them no charge that I do not make against myself—I say that another peculiar difficulty in our way is, that we are incapacitated for teaching English superlatively well by our own ignorance of English? I do not here refer to our lack of special training for the work—our not having thoroughly learned what there was to do, and our failure to equip ourselves adequately to do it. Of this kind of ignorance I have already said a word or two ; it would be ungracious here to say more, especially as I shall be forced to assume this when, in a subsequent paper, I speak of means and methods. But the ignorance to which I now refer is not that which we *know* possesses us, not that of which we are conscious (if we can be conscious of a negative), but that ignorance of which we ourselves are ignorant and unconscious. “Cleanse thou me from secret faults,” prayed the Psalmist. It is the secret faults in speech from which we should struggle mightily to deliver ourselves ; prayer, unfortunately, will not help us here. We are not to suppose, because we have corrected bales of compositions, taught grammar and rhetoric, and even written on them, that necessarily our English is above reproach. The

widest reading of good authors and the greatest familiarity with their felicities are no guaranty that we speak always with correctness. Who of us has not, when occasionally he has seen himself in the mirror of some one else's better English, been startled at some instance of his own ignorance. Happy is he if he has been startled out of it as well as startled at it! We may need rougher treatment to make the disclosure, and may receive it. Some months ago, while examining a grammar class sent up to me, a hand was raised, and a boy modestly asked, "Professor, did you not say, 'what kind of *a* sentence is that?' " Here was a sudden revelation of a fault about which I had written much and spoken, and yet a fault of which all my life I had myself been unconsciously guilty. And what service a friend recently did me in correcting a life-long, but unsuspected, mispronunciation of a certain vowel. Ashamed of such ignorance—of course; but one should be more ashamed of a pretence to perfect knowledge, or of an insensibility so dense that he is never shocked into true self-knowledge.

Hamerton says that only under peculiar family conditions can a second language, a foreign, be perfectly acquired; and that, when so acquired, it is always at some loss to the native tongue—like the second charge in a pop-gun, it can enter only as it drives the first somewhat before it. It would be quite safe to go further. No one ever yet acquired perfectly a *single* language, completely conquered and retained more than portions of one. At best we make only incursions into its territory, and, with an ever loosening grasp, hold what we seize. There are early deficiencies that can never be supplied, youthful errors that cannot be corrected. Like a cut they leave a permanently visible scar, like a disease they forever enfeeble the organ affected. What we thought was strangled to death and resolved to dust turns up to light and life under favoring conditions. The tomb opes its ponderous and marble jaws and casts it up again. The speaker may not be aware of its reappearance, but others are.

What author of text-books is not often appealed to by teachers whose English moves him to pity, to execration, or to despair? How vague the purpose of the letter, ill-digested the thought, careless the paragraphing; and what execrable spelling and capitalization, hit-or-miss punctuation, absence of selection in the words taken, and slovenliness in the sequence of words, phrases, clauses, sentences! How clumsy, uncouth, inchoate the whole

production ! In the presence of such missives, the bad English in Dr. Rice's recent articles in *The Forum*, and even the answers in the two papers that inspired this article pale their uneffectual fire. Who of us has been so fortunate in his teachers—whether in school, in college, or in the pulpit—as not to recall some violation of good usage that often dropped from their revered lips ? Happy the man, if one there be, whose respect for his instructors is without qualification of this kind !

Eternal vigilance is the price of liberty—and not of liberty alone. But even authors cannot at *such* a price purchase complete exemption from mistakes in speech. We are not likely to keep out what without our knowledge leaks in. Look at these specimens from a cabinet collected in recent excursions among authors : Its members are the very officials whom Canning said existed to make a House.—*Bagehot*. An Irishman who, like Priestly, the Republicans delighted to honor.—*McMaster*. Each in their separate world.—*Hutton*. The destruction of both horse and cart and loading.—*Scott*. It was Bacon's intention to have dedicated it to Prince Henry.—*Skeat*. Deronda was not long before he came to Diplow.—*Geo. Eliot*. The king's English policy, like his English name, are the signs of a new epoch.—*J. R. Green*. Josephine looks superbly in her white tulle.—*R. Grant*. Lowell and Arnold . . . the one in Old England and the other in the New.—*Stedman*. Hither had poor Steele retreated and laid perdu.—*Irving*. Neither Pope nor Council are on a level with the Apostles.—*Newman*. A black snake was killed by a neighbor of mine which had swallowed a full grown red squirrel.—*Birrell*. You have had the pocket-book fever when you were little.—*Holmes*. Mr. Lang seemes inclined to try and throw doubt upon it.—*Arnold*. Both of them found the other more like other people than he had expected.—*Kingsley*. Any thief . . . be he whom he might, should be hung.—*Collins*.

We may perhaps derive some comfort from the fact that even great authors sometimes blunder in their putting of things. But these instances are not given to administer comfort. If, try as they may, the English of these men is not always immaculate, what is ours likely to be ? This is the question enforced. If the righteous scarcely be saved where shall the ungodly and the sinner appear ? We can drag some of our secret sins into the light and get rid of them, if we will ; but the work will be slow even if we prosecute it with zeal and unwearying diligence.



It was said that in this matter of unconscious ignorance we teachers of English are hampered by a difficulty peculiar to our study. Is not this obvious? One need not know much mathematics to teach algebra surpassingly well. Analytics and the Calculus might throw some light on his path, but they are not involved in his work, and would be quite as likely to hinder as to help. At any rate algebra can be taught well enough without acquaintance with these higher departments. But every department of English may be involved in a single recitation; the principles regulative of speech, and these in all their applications, are sure to underlie the work of any day. What a chance for this lurking ignorance to betray itself! And how it does betray itself; how example sets at naught our instruction by precept! We are judged by our deeds and not by our works—practice annuls preaching unless in accord with it.

Another thought and I close. It is to be feared that many teachers are under adverse influences. I do not now speak of the grammars and the rhetorics, etc., out of which we teach, and on which we rely as authority. It would not become me to say of these that they are misleading. But there is a class of books of which I may speak, of which I have qualified myself to speak. They have come into being within a few years, but have been sown broadcast over the land. They profess to teach good English, and they pronounce on hundreds of points—proscribing what we may not say, prescribing what we may. It cannot be doubted that these books are doing unspeakable harm to all who put their trust in them. Their writers singularly agree in what they condemn and in what they approve—each perhaps adding some items of his own to those already accumulated. But it does not appear that these men have the warrant of usage for what they so oracularly teach. This can be affirmed, for in many, in most, of the important judgments they pronounce they are in conflict with usage—usage plainly allowing what they peremptorily forbid. The only authority any one of them seems to recognize is his own individual reason. Whatever expressions seem to him incongruous, unparsable, ill-sounding, illogical, or unnecessary, opposed to the genius of the language as he interprets it, without analogy to support or etymology to vindicate them—whatever for any of these reasons or for any other reason seems to him objectionable is summarily condemned.

To get at the verdict of usage on points thus dogmatically settled, and on others these critics have passed by, I have consulted the best authors, British and American, now living ; or, if dead, living till quite recently. I have carefully *read fifty* of these *authors* and *read three hundred pages of each*. The work is just finished. What these men by habitual use teach on these points and what they thus declare to be unexceptionable English has been minutely and accurately noted. Let me give you a few of the words and phrases which usage, thus ascertained, says we *may* employ, but which these purists tell us we *may not, must not, use*. Would that the corrections here made might spread as widely as the errors have circulated !

We *may* use *each other* when speaking of more than two things ; *one another* when speaking of only two ; *at best* instead of *at the best* ; *no more* instead of *not more* ; *a word or two* as well as *one or two words* ; *had rather* or *had better* with the present infinitive ; *such a rare* possession, for instance, as well as *so rare a* possession ; some *one else's*, any *body else's*, etc. ; *either* in the sense of *each* ; *either* and *neither*, as conjunctions or as adjective pronouns, with three or more things ; a noun object clause beginning with *if* ; *whether* when three or more things are spoken of ; *round* or *around* with or without words implying motion ; *between* when three or more things are spoken of ; *none* in the singular or in the plural ; *other* and *than* with a noun or other word between them—*other thoughts than* these, for instance ; *the* with a participle having an object ; *which* relating to a clause or a sentence for its antecedent ; *get* in other senses than attainment by exertion ; the *form* seen in *is being built* or *was being built* ; and we *may* close a sentence with a preposition, or follow the indefinite pronoun *one* by a personal pronoun in place of *one*.

These are but a few of the many permissible things which these *don't* books prohibit—usage permitting what self-chosen arbiters of speech disallow. These men are marking out for our feet a path narrower than the broad highway usage has cast up, they are abridging our native and proper freedom, they are inducing a dire monotony of expression, they are burdening the memory with distinctions without essential differences, and wasting in feather edge our intellectual discrimination. The least we can say of their influence upon the reader is, that it is calamitous in the extreme. Let us get out from under their malign influence.

I have decanted a few thoughts into this article—unprofitable thoughts, I fear. But the plea made has at least done the pleader good. If time shall allow and the Editor approve, I may take some space in a future number of the REVIEW—perhaps the next—for some suggestions more helpful to the teacher in his work.

*Brainerd Kellogg.*

*Polytechnic Institute, Brooklyn, Jan. 20, 1893.*

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### TEACHING SHAKESPEARE.

In every English Literature course, and in every college preparatory course, one or more of Shakespeare's works appear as topics for special study. How these plays are to be taught so that the student shall be enabled to pass an examination intelligently is a question that must often occur to every conscientious teacher of English.

It is a task of no difficulty to announce to-day that to-morrow's lesson will consist of so many scenes, say, of *Julius Caesar*, and that the class will be expected to familiarize itself with the allotted portion. When to-morrow comes, however, it is no unusual experience to find that the preparation has been exceedingly superficial, and that it is a difficult matter to maintain the interest of the class. This is a lamentable state of affairs, and there is some reason for the condition, could we find it, "For this effect defective comes by cause." Teachers in English will feel the deepest satisfaction when they find a way to make their pupils as enthusiastically familiar with the story of *Othello* and *Desdemona* as with that of *Ivanhoe* and *Rebecca*; when they can arouse as much fervor over the duel between *Laertes* and *Hamlet* as over the chariot race in *Ben Hur*.

The inability to arouse in young students an interest and an appreciation of Shakespeare is due, in many instances, to mistaken conceptions about the proper methods of instruction. One cause, at least, underlying these false methods has been reached by Professor Ransome. He says, "The teaching of literature in schools is for the most part in the hands of men [?] who have been accus-